



April 30, 2024

The Honorable Tom Carper
Chairman
Committee on Environment & Public Works
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Selley Moore Capito
Ranking Member
Committee on Environment & Public Works
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Carper and Ranking Member Capito:

On behalf of the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition, we write to share our support for S. 3738, the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative Act of 2024, and urge the Committee on Environment & Public Works favorably advance the legislation to the full Senate.

The Great Lakes define our region's way of life, provide drinking water for over 30 million Americans, and is at the heart of a binational economy that is the third largest in the world. The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) has allowed the region of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and its federally recognized Tribes to undertake one of the world's largest freshwater ecosystem restoration projects. This legislation is essential to continue this work, restore our waters, and protect the health of those that rely on them across the region and nation.

S. 3738 reauthorizes the successful Great Lakes Restoration Initiative and helps meet the on-the-ground needs of communities across the region by authorizing \$500 million annually over five years. Over the past decade the GLRI has improved lives across Great Lakes communities after decades of environmental damage threatened public health, the regional economy, and drinking water. With work underway or completed on more than 7,500 restoration projects, the initiative has resulted in economic returns of more than 3 to 1 across the region and made tremendous progress. Because of the GLRI:

- 5 Areas of Concern (AOC), the most toxic and contaminated sites in the region – Presque Isle, PA; Deer Lake, MI; White Lake, MI; Lower Menominee River, MI & WI; and Ashtabula River, OH – have been delisted. The management actions necessary to delist 10 additional AOCs have also been completed. In the previous two decades before the GLRI, only one AOC had been cleaned up.
- 113 beneficial use impairments (BUIs) have been addressed under the GLRI, over 10 times the total number of BUIs removed in the preceding 22 years, restoring fish and wildlife habitat and providing safe access to our shorelines and waters for recreation.
- 1.8 million farmland acres in priority watersheds have received technical and financial support to implement nutrient management actions. Conservation efforts have resulted in

a projected reduction of 2 million pounds of phosphorus runoff, a major contributor to toxic algal blooms.

- Over 6,700 river miles have been cleared of dams and barriers resulting in fish swimming into stretches of river where they have been absent for decades and increasing biodiversity overall.
- Nearly 480,000 acres of habitat, including 72,000 acres of coastal wetlands, have been enhanced, protected, and restored improving ecosystem and community resilience.

Even with these results, there is still much work to be done. Two-thirds of impairments remain untreated across 15 AOCs, placing the health of communities at risk. Drinking water and coastal economies remain under threat from toxic algal blooms that have shut down entire water systems, as was seen in Toledo, Ohio in 2014. Invasive species, like invasive carp, are knocking at the door of the lakes and threaten a \$7 billion fishery. Moreover, emerging contaminants and a changing climate continue to exacerbate the challenges we face, many of which disproportionately impact people that have historically borne the brunt of environmental injustice. This underscores the urgency for the GLRI to address these growing threats by working to ensure restoration investments lead to equitable outcomes for everyone in the region.

The GLRI has been an environmental and economic success, but much work remains. The region stands ready to continue this important federal partnership and ensure that all benefit from and enjoy these investments in restoration and protection.

Since 2004, the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition has been harnessing the collective power of more than 180 groups representing millions of people, whose common goal is to restore and protect the Great Lakes. We are pleased to offer our support for this much-needed bill and urge the Committee to favorably report the GLRI Act for consideration by the full Senate.

Please reach out to Alexis Lopez-Cepero, our coalition's Senior Policy Manager, at alopez-cepero@npca.org with any questions.

Sincerely,

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CC:

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow, Co-Chair, Great Lakes Task Force

The Honorable JD Vance, Co-Chair, Great Lakes Task Force